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Lucia A Keegan 07/18/2006 03:12:52 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Middle East - Iran -G8 Summit
Wrap-Up

PARIS - Tuesday, July 18, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Middle East
Iran
G8 Wrap-Up

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The international community's mobilization to find a solution to the Israeli-Lebanese conflict and French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin's trip to Lebanon as a show of France's support are the leading international stories today. Under the headline "The Big Powers Look for a Way Out of the Crisis," right-of-center Le Figaro notes that "French Diplomacy is Taking a Leading Role." French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy granted interviews to popular right-of-center Le Parisien, state-run France 2 television and

state-run France Inter radio, in which he insisted that: "creating the conditions that allow for a durable ceasefire" should be the immediate objective of the international community. Dailies also report the evacuation of hundreds of French citizens from Beirut qualified as a "mess" on state-run France 3's newscast yesterday evening.

Left-of-center Liberation's headline is "Villepin: Operation Beirut." The accompanying article asserts that by placing himself on the forefront of the international scene, Villepin is trying to put the Clearstream scandal and the CPE riots behind him. "Villepin quickly grasped the role that French diplomacy, and above all he, could play in the current crisis in the Middle East. At the lowest depths in terms of approval ratings, Villepin could not have dreamed of a better opportunity to display his supposed talents as a statesman." The less cynical editorial in left-of-center Liberation notes that Villepin's trip to Beirut underscores the "singular historical, political and cultural relationship that France has with Lebanon." State-run France Inter radio criticized Villepin's visit as being perfectly timed for the news cycle; he arrived in late afternoon which assured coverage on the 8 p.m. newscasts, had quick meetings including with some departing French ex-pats.

An editorial in the regional daily La Nouvel Republique du Centre Ouest says that "we will know soon enough if the discussions that the Prime Minister had with Lebanese leaders, including from Hezbollah, will help resolve the current crisis. For Villepin it would mark the heaven-sent revitalization of his reputation. No doubt he still dreams of the speech delivered in New York against the war in Iraq."

An op-ed in economic right-of-center Les Echos underscores that the use of radio-guided missiles by Lebanon's Hezbollah "radically changes the strategic and diplomatic order of things in the conflict with Israel... In previous confrontations, Israel was never threatened from the sky... But today the Shiite extremists are well-equipped thanks to Syria and Iran." Alain Frachon in left-of-center Le Monde analyzes the "Shadow of Iran in the Middle East." (See Part C)

The G8 Summit is the second leading story in today's national and regional press. A number of commentaries offer post-G8 analyses on what was accomplished in Saint Petersburg. The unsigned editorial in left-of-center Le Monde gives an history of how Russia became part of the G8 and wonders about an organization that will include Russia but not emerging democracies like Brazil and India. Right-of-center Le Figaro says that in spite of the situation in Lebanon "Putin is defending the outcome of 'his' G8... and has earned his place in the club of superpowers." (See Part C)

Catholic La Croix and economic dailies discuss attempts at the G8 to relaunch the Doha Round. La Croix reports that the WTO's Director General Pascal Lamy made an appearance at the G8 "in the shadows." Lamy hoped to gain concessions from leaders on the Doha round, stalled since July 1. Observers described the discussions about trade liberalization as "very tense." Jacques Chirac stated France's opposition to European concessions in the absence of reciprocity by the U.S. and developing countries. Chirac was further perturbed, La Croix says, by the lack of representation of developing African countries in the debate. Left-of-center Le Monde reports that "the U.S. continues to block the entry of Russia to the WTO."

Brief but widespread mention of President Bush's aside to PM Blair on televised and radio news as well as in the print press. Popular tabloid-like daily France Soir says that the President's candor shows that he is still "as subtle as ever." Regional daily Le Dauphine Libr's editorial is harsh: "That the most powerful man on Earth could swear like a sailor, everyone has known at least since Nixon. And some may say that it's better than the usual political cant. But it is hard sometimes not to be frightened by the small-mindedness of some of the most powerful people when they think that no one is listening."

Widely mentioned in print and electronic news, the successful landing of the space shuttle Discovery prompts right-of-center Le Figaro on its front page to say that this second successful shuttle flight "three years after the Columbia tragedy represents a huge relief for NASA."

In economic news, print and broadcast media all announce that "Airbus is back in the race" against Boeing with the new version of the A350. Right-of-center Le Figaro Economie notes that "Airbus is hitting two birds with one stone... the new version of the A350 will rival both the Boeing 787 and the 777."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Middle East

"First Steps"

Francois Ernewein editorializes in Catholic La Croix (07/18): "We may lament the slow awakening of the international community or make fun of the wishy-washy agreement invented by the G8 that does not even call for a cease-fire... But at least the ball has started rolling."

"France's Margin of Maneuver"

In regional Le Telegramme, the editorial by Hubert Coudurier (07/18): "France's margin of maneuver in the Middle East crisis is slim given that the U.S. and its ally Israel have decided to confront the Islamist Shiites that have caused the eruption of violence in the region."

"What Can France Do?"

In regional Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace Jean-Claude Keiffer writes (07/18): "What can France do in the Middle East? On the face of it, it is difficult for Paris to intercede in the conflict. With Damascus, colluding with Hezbollah, the bridges have all been burned. With Teheran, sponsor of the Islamist Shiites, the relationship is tense since the nuclear crisis. And with Israel, in spite of courteous statements on both sides, France drags a pro-Arab reputation behind it."

Iran

"Shadow of Iran in the Middle East"

Alain Frachon in left-of-center Le Monde (07/18): "Officially, Iran manifests its support for the Palestinian Hamas and has close links with Hezbollah. But even if Teheran says that it has nothing to do with the July 12 kidnappings of two Israeli soldiers, it is difficult to imagine that the Islamic Republic did not at least give its tacit approval to its Lebanese Hezbollah protgs. What is in it for Iran? July 12 was the day when faced with Iran's ill will, the negotiators on the issue of Iran's nuclear program decided to put the question before the UNSC. Coincidence? Maybe... But what if Iran was trying to prove the scope of its capacity to do harm by giving Hezbollah free rein? Or give the U.S. a sampler of what it can expect if its nuclear installations were to be attacked? America's indulgence with regard to Israel's intervention in Lebanon is seen by some as a warning from Washington to Teheran. The various protagonists of the crisis do not always measure the consequences of their actions and the kidnappings may lead all parties to a situation far beyond what was initially intended."

G8 Wrap-Up

"A G8 Without Scope"

The unsigned editorial in left-of-center Le Monde (07/18): "The meeting of the G8 turned into a crisis cell to discuss the Middle East... Some had hoped that the meetings would lead to a plan of action but it is wrong to want to make the G8 into something that it is not: a global manager of day-to-day affairs. This G8 was not useless even if its staging was excessive... And Mr. Putin not only drowned out all considerations of his failings in terms of democracy and was able to reap a maximum of benefit from this Summit by turning it into a personal public relations campaign." STAPLETON